

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 PM-07 NSC-10 SS-15 RSC-01 CIAE-00

DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-03 USIA-15 PRS-01 RSR-01

OMB-01 /079 W

----- 128508

R 030942Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4891

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 3421

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT

SUBJECT: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF TUN ISMAIL'S DEATH

1. SUMMARY: DEATH OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER TUN DR. ISMAIL AUG 2 LEAVES GOM WITH LEADERSHIP GAPS THAT WILL BE DIFFICULT--AND POLITICALLY TRICKY--TO FILL. ALTHOUGH IT KNOWN FOR SOME TIME THAT ISMAIL WANTED TO RETIRE, HIS SUDDEN DEATH OPENS UP NEW AVENUES OF CONTENTION WITHIN UMNO AS WELL AS NEED TO FILL IMPORTANT HOME AFFAIRS AND TRADE/INDUSTRY PORTFOLIOS. ISMAIL'S SOLID, MODERATE AND QUIET LEADERSHIP WILL BE SORELY MISSED. PM RAZAK HAS LOST VALUABLE AIDE SINCE THERE IS PROBABLY NO ONE WHO ENJOYS SAME TRUST AND CONFIDENCE. END SUMMARY.

2. IN EATH OF DPM ISAMIL, GOM AND PM RAZAK HAVE LOST TOWER OF STRENGTH AND MODERATION. RESULTANT LEADERSHIP GAP PRESENTS PM WITH SEVERAL IMPORTANT POLITICAL AND GOVERNMENTAL PROBLEMS: (A) THERE IS NO ONE WHO IS APPARENTLY AS CLOSE TO "ALTER EGO" STATUS AS ISMAIL AND PM WILL UNDOUBTEDLY NEED SUCH AN INDIVIDUAL TO CARRY
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ON BUSINESS OF GOVT WHILE HE IS OCCUPIED BY POLICY MATTERS

AND ON FREQUENT TRIPS, BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE COUNTRY;
(B) ISMAIL HAS BEEN STRONG MODERATE FORCE IN KEEPING
PARTY AND INTRA-GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS ON EVEN KEEL;
(C) FILLING SENSITIVE HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO BY TRUSTED
MALAY POLITICIAN; (D) HANDLING OF RIVALRIES WITHIN
UMNO AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE HAD DESIGNS ON DEPUTY PM
AND PARTY LEADER POSITIONS; AND (E) SOMEWHAT LESS
PRESSING NEED FILL TRADE AND INDUSTRY PORTFOLIO WITH
SOMEONE ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH MALAYS AND CHINESE BUSINESS
COMMUNITY.

3. ON INTRA-UMNO AFFAIRS, PARTY HAS SCHEDULED
EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS IN NOV TO TAKE UP ISSUES NOT
DEALT WITH IN DEPTH AT JUNE 30 SESSION. AS SHOWN IN
1972 LEADERSHIP ELECTIONS, UMNO YOUTH LEADER HARUN AND
GHAZALI SHAFIE HAVE OBVIOUS DESIGNS ON TOP PARTY POSTS
AND WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE VYING FOR INFLUENCE IN COMING
WEEKS AND MONTHS; ALSO, MODERATE DARK-HORSE EDUCATION
MIN HUSSEIN ONN WOULD ALSO BE GOOD CANDIDATE TO FILL
DEP PARTY LEADER AND HOME AFFAIRS JOBS. OF COURSE,
PM COULD PREEMPT POLTICKING BY NAMING CHOICE IN ADVANCE
OF EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS (WHICH ITSELF COULD BE DELAYED
AT RAZAK'S DESCRETION, BUT SUCH MOVE MIGHT GO AGAINST
TRADITION OF PARTY DEMOCRACY.

4. RE GOVT VACANCIES, ISMAIL ENJOYED TRUST OF CHINESE
AND HAD UNSULLIED REPUTATION FOR BEING FAIR AND JUST;
SENSITIVE HOME AFFAIRS AND TRADE/INDUSTRY PORTFOLIOS
SHOULD IDEALLY BE HELD BY MEN OF HIGH CALIBER AS WELL AS
ACCEPTABLE TO CHINESE. IT POSSIBLE OF COURSE TO LEAVE
THESE PORTFOLIOS VACANT FOR SOME TIME BUT HOME AFFAIRS
DEP MIN ALI HAJI AHMAD AND TRADE/INDUSTRY DEP MIN
USA HITAM HAVE BEEN IN THEIR JOBS ONLY SIX MONTHS.
MINISTERIAL SWEEPSTAKES WILL SURELY INTENSIFY IN WEEKS AHEAD.

5. IN INTRA-GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS, ISMAIL HAD CONSERVATIVE
BENT AND WAS OFTEN PM'S INSTRUMENT FOR KEEPING
UNRULY ELEMENTS AND INDEPENDENTS IN LINE. FOR EXAMPLE,
ISMAIL TOOK HARD-LINE AGAINST HARUN'S AND UMNO YOUTH'S
CHAUVINIST TENDENCIES AND HE ATTEMPTED KEEP SABAH
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CHIEF MINISTER TUN MUSTAPHA IN CHECK. SIMILARLY, HE
KEPT TIGHT REIN ON INTERNAL SECURITY, CITIZENSHIP AND
OTHER IMPORTANT COMMUNAL RELATIONS MATTERS.

6. IN SUMMARY, ISMAIL'S SHOES PROBABLY CANNOT BE FILLED
BY ANY SINGLE MAN. PM RAZAK WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO
FIND THE PEOPLE TO HANDLE THE MANY FUNCTIONS ISMAIL
PERFORMED. MOST IMPORTANT WILL BE THE CHOICE OF SOMEONE

WHO WILL BE ABLE TO CARRY ON ISMAIL'S SPECIAL ROLE OF
ALTER EGO AND TO ADD THE STIFFENING TO THE DECISION-
MAKING PROCESS THAT ISMAIL HAS PROVIDED FOR MANY YEARS.
THIS MAY WELL BE THE MOST CHALLENGING TEST RAZAK HAS
FACED SINCE IT INVOLVES THE BALANCE OF POLITICAL FORCES
IN THE COUNTRY AS WELL AS THE DELICATE BALANCE OF THE
RACIAL COMMUNITIES.
LYDMAN

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